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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are given to teachers of handicapped students concerning developing helpful relationships with parents. Topics covered include what parents want to know, preparing for a teacher-parent conference, selecting a place, making arrangements for the conference, obtaining further information, communicating with parents, and working with parents who have problems. Additional suggestions concern special tips for working with parents of handicapped children, and ways in which teachers can help. (CL)

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TIPS FOR TEACHERS

ON

SCHOOL - PARENT COMMUNICATION

By

Charlotte Pickens, ACSW

Illustrations by Ann Downs

Revised Edition

Published by

Magnolia School District

Magnolia, Arkansas

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FOREWORD

In the fall of 1970 the Magnolia School District initiated a program for five-year-old children with handicaps. This project included working out patterns for parent involvement. For two years it was funded by a grant from the U. S. Office of Education; Bureau of Education for the Handicapped. It is now a part of the regular preschool program.

As we worked with parents and teachers, the need for some kind of manual for beginning teachers became evident. Charlotte Pickens, social worker with the project, has worked with teachers and parents in the project to develop a school-home system of communication. This manual is a result of the experiences of the staff in working out procedures that could be shared with other schools. The techniques and patterns presented here have been tested in the project and will give ideas on improving school-parent communications. They are a result of the combined skills of many teachers and parents who have learned to communicate for the good of the children.

These suggestions should be helpful to teachers at all grade levels and with parents of handicapped or non-handicapped children. We offer it as part of our program to other teachers who want guidelines for work with parents.

Louise Phillips, Director

Home and School Services
for Preschool Handicapped
Children

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REASONS FOR TEACHER-PARENT CONFERENCES

Why Parents Come to School

Parents come to school because they care about their children, and want what is best for them. Most parents want to cooperate with the school. Sometimes they come at the request of the school, and sometimes they drop by without a specific invitation. They will often make rather complicated arrangements at home and at work to keep appointments made with the school, and to attend and help with school activities.

In the past, parents were only contacted when something had gone wrong at school. Even today, when parents are called on the telephone from school their first reaction may be, "Has something happened to Johnny?" If their child attends a school which does not have regularly planned conferences with parents, their next thought is likely to be that Johnny is failing academically, has broken school rules, or is about to be sent home for some reason. Because of this, the person at school making the appointment should give the reason for the request, and begin with the initial phone call or note to build up a good feeling between the school and home.

As schools plan toward more and better communication with parents, there should be fewer parents who feel the need to contact the school only over "bad" situations. A systematic plan for parent contact with school makes it possible for parents and teachers to discuss problems before they reach this magnitude. The parent should feel that he may contact the school about matters that concern him without having to wait until a crisis has developed.

When a Teacher Sees a Parent

Every school district has policies for communication with parents which are set up by the administration and carried out by the staff. It is the responsibility of the superintendent to see that these policies are made, and that they are carried out. The teacher should be familiar with these policies, and know how they will affect her* relationship with parents and relatives, both in school and out.

Usually the principal for the building and the counselor, if there is one, will be given the responsibility for initiating and handling conferences concerning attendance, behavior, and family problems, particularly those which are complicated. It is to be hoped that each school district has a policy for each teacher or some other designated peron to have a conference with the parents of each student at some time during the school year. Academic work and behavior in the classroom and at play are the topics most often covered by the teacher.

In any case, teachers are likely to see and talk to parents several times during the year in an informal way when they run into each other at such places as the grocery store, a ball game, or church. While it is best to discuss school business at school or the parents' home it is all right for the teacher to talk with parents on any chance occasion they meet. Informal contacts with parents may be used effectively to continue the relationship the teacher has started on a more formal basis. For example, the conversation might focus on recent events in the child's life, at home or at school. If the parents have specific questions concerning the child at school, it is best to make an appointment to discuss these at school.

* It will be noted that reference is made throughout the pamphlet, in the interest of clarity, to the teacher as SHE and the parent as HE.

What Parents Want to Know

Every parent basically wants to know whether someone at school cares about their child, and what they can do to help him learn. In general, these are the things they want to know from the school:

1. Does someone at school care about my child?

   No parent will ask this question, but it will underlie all school-parent contacts. The teacher should be gracious and courteous with parents as she would be to guests at her home. The teacher's attitude toward the parent and child will answer this question.

2. What will my child study?

   The teacher should discuss the materials used for the subject, and tell how they will be used during the year. Daily activities may be described, including rest, play, and academic skills. The teacher should tell the parent whether homework will be expected, and whether books will be taken home.

3. Is my child doing as well as he should (working up to his ability)?

   This question may be answered from the teacher's experience with the child in the classroom and from results of psychological or group achievement testing. The parent will need guidance from the teacher in what should be expected of the child in this class at this time of year.

4. How will the school activities help him?

   The teacher should explain some of her methods and the kind of classroom activities involved. Discussion of the teacher's evaluation of the child's strengths, weaknesses, and achievements

can be very helpful to the parent.

5. What do you do at school to help the child who learns faster or more slowly than the rest of the class?

   The teacher should explain how she follows each child's progress, and adapts materials to his needs. A discussion of use of materials on different levels and of grouping children may be helpful. The parent should be assured that the child's progress will be watched all year. If this is of special concern to the parent, plans should be made to discuss this with him again later.

6. What is the grading system?

   Parents are concerned that their child pass to the next grade, and are likely to be overconcerned about individual marks. It is best to discuss strengths and weaknesses rather than only the grade given. If the school's grading system is based on the child's ability to perform, this should be explained to the parent.

7. How does my child get along with other children?

   Every parent hopes his child gets along well with other children at school. The teacher should discuss the child's strengths and the things that need improvement. It is helpful to tell of incidents that have happened at school to illustrate. Be honest, but not blunt.

8. What are the policies concerning discipline?

   Does the child usually obey the teacher? The teacher should tell of the ways children of this age are handled at school, and under what circumstances the teacher would discuss the child's behavior with his parents.

9. How will the school rules and procedures affect my child?

The parent will usually mention his areas of concern, such as lunch, discipline, class time, grading, or play time. The teacher should discuss the policies in general unless the parent has a special concern.

10. How can we help our child learn?

The teacher should give some things for the parent to do at home. Directions should be clear and concise; only a few suggestions should be given at a time. Another conference should be offered within a given period of time to see how they are progressing.

PLANNING FOR TEACHER-PARENT CONFERENCES

Preparing for the Conference

The time of year set for the conferences depends primarily on the kind of schedule followed by the school district. In many schools, it is planned that the teachers will have a teacher-parent conference sometime during the first semester, and again in the second, with the dates to be determined in faculty planning with reference to the school calendar of events. The kinds of material to be discussed varies, but usually the teacher will wish to discuss social and motor skills, language development, perceptual skills, and such other subjects as grading policies, behavior management, and results of psychological and achievement tests administered by the school.

If possible, the teacher should begin plans for teacher-parent conferences before school starts in the fall. The planning is often begun during the preschool workshops when the staff in each building lays out plans for the school year. The teacher will be advised to whom she is responsible for this planning, and what person on the school staff will be available to her for consultation and assistance. This is usually the principal in her building. In some school districts it is a school counselor.

"Mini-conferences" may be worked out when the parent or teacher finds there is a need. These are usually for the purpose of keeping school and home aware of recent developments, especially those which would affect plans previously made.

It should be understood that the matters discussed at the conference are considered confidential as far as the school is concerned. If the parent trusts the school enough to discuss personal and family matters, he should be able to rely in complete trust in the school. One violation of confidentiality by the school could forfeit, not only the trust of the parent involved, but also the school-parent program in the community.

In preparation for the conference, the teacher should become familiar with the material available in the student's permanent record. She should note the family composition; their geographic location; parents' education; place of employment and kind of work; whatever is known about the parents' expectations for this child; and the family's attitude toward the school. The parents will respond to the teacher in direct ratio to the teacher's understanding of the parents' position.

The teacher should study the records regarding the child's health, with particular reference to vision and hearing; health problems, such as allergy, diabetes, or epilepsy; and any medication which is to be given at school. She should become familiar with results of psychological and group achievement tests, and should know the child's mental ability in terms of average, superior, below average, and so on.

She should prepare a folder of the child's work, beginning in the fall and accumulating all year. This is useful in making comparisons and showing progress. The folder would include at least one sample of work for each conference which the parent may take home with him. The teacher will also want to make a note of the child's current interests.

After assembling this material, the teacher should go over any questions with her principal prior to the teacher-parent conference. She should ask the principal to sit in on a parent conference if she thinks it may prove difficult. The teacher should also discuss with the principal the possibility for some other school person to talk with a parent who is a relative or close friend if the teacher thinks she might have difficulty being objective.

The teacher will then note the topics she wishes to include in each conference, and use this simple outline with her parent conferences. This will assure that she meets the situation with knowledge rather than misinformation or prejudice.

Selecting a Place for the Conference

Teacher-parent conferences are most often held at school. They may be held anywhere at school where there is room. The teacher's classroom is one of the best places, if this can be arranged. Seeing the parent at school places the discussion in a setting familiar to the child; makes it possible for the parent to visualize better the materials and equipment used; and often makes it easier for parents to ask questions about school affairs. It makes for a more business-like atmosphere, where the teacher may have use of school records and materials.

The appearance of the room will be very important in setting the tone of the conference. It should be neat, clean, and as attractive as possible. Since the teacher wants a friendly informal setting she will probably want to sit near the parents in chairs or at a table in the room rather than using her desk. She should insure that there will be no interruptions, and may wish to place a sign on the door, such as: "Conference - DO NOT DISTURB."

An attractive and inviting waiting place helps set the mood for a successful conference. The teacher should try to have several comfortable chairs, with reading materials, available near the conference room. In some schools it is possible to arrange for a parent or other volunteer to welcome parents and see that they are made comfortable while they wait. Perhaps coffee may be served.

Hardly any school has extra space for this purpose. If the teachers' lounge is to be used for the conferences, it should be made available for parents only. Otherwise, there are likely to be unavoidable interruptions, making a private conference impossible. The feeling of welcome and a pleasant atmosphere are much more important than the actual waiting place - visitors can feel quite comfortable waiting in the hall, school office, or an anteroom if they are made to feel welcome. One advantage of parents' waiting in a hall is the privilege of watching usual school activities while they wait.

Making Arrangements for the Conference

Many teachers prefer conferences by appointment, as it is a more economical use of both parents' and teachers' time. Arrangements may be made by telephone, or a note may be sent home by the child. In many families both parents work. Appointments are helpful to the parent who does rotating shift work, has unusual hours, or works split shifts. Mothers who must make baby-sitting arrangements for the children at home also appreciate having a specific appointment time.

Whether the appointment is made by telephone or in writing, it is usually best to give the purpose for the conference, set a specific time, tell the parents approximately how long the conference will take, and ask that they call to make different arrangements if the time or date is not satisfactory. For example, the teacher might say, "Johnny is having difficulty with the vowel sounds, and we would like to talk with you about what we are working on to improve the situation."

In some school districts, classes are dismissed for one or two days at an announced time, and parents are asked to go to the school for teacher conferences. In others, arrangements are made for the teacher to see parents before or after school, at lunch time, or at free periods. Some schools make it possible for the teacher to see parents all during the day by relieving her of classroom duties for that period of time. Several districts have found it helpful to set aside one or more evenings for appointments for parents who could not come during usual school hours.

A home visit is a good way of getting acquainted with parents, and it gives the teacher a better understanding of the child. Some teachers make a home visit in the fall for the first contact with the family, and follow it up with one or two conferences at school later in the year.

The home visit is especially helpful in working with the parent with a chronic illness; the mother with several young children; the parent with transportation problems;

the aged head of the family; the parent of a handicapped child; and the household composed of several groups of relatives.

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Obtaining Further Information - And How to Use It

A teacher should never hesitate to discuss the "different" child with the principal or curriculum supervisor as soon as she knows the child seems to have a problem. Sometimes a teacher hesitates to discuss such a child because she thinks her teaching methods are to blame if this child does not respond, learn, or behave like the other children in the class.

When discussing the child who seems to have a problem, the teacher should be prepared to describe the ways in which the child responds to the usual methods of handling such a problem. Perhaps there is additional information in the child's permanent folder which would help give a better understanding of the problem, or perhaps the parents have discussed the matter with the principal. Often, however, there is no additional information available at school.

If there is no additional information available to the school, the principal should talk with the child's parents about the possibility of obtaining further evaluation of the problem. The principal, or counselor, and the teacher may wish to have a joint conference with the parents at this time. After the parents give their consent for further information to be obtained, the principal will then be available to help them make the referrals.

If the school has the resources for further diagnostic work, the principal will refer the child for vision or hearing screening, psychological testing, or further diagnostic teaching, as seems indicated. If the child has not been seen recently by a doctor, perhaps a referral would also be made to the family physician. After the workup is done, the findings would be shared with the teacher and parents and the information placed in the child's permanent folder.

If the school does not have the resources for further diagnostic work or more extensive evaluation seems

indicated than the school can do, the principal may need to help determine to whom referral is to be made. The child with a physical handicap, the one with behavior or emotional problems, the one with learning problems, or the one with multiple handicaps, is most likely to be referred to physicians, special clinics, or other agencies for evaluation. It is usually best to refer the child first to the family physician for a medical examination. The physician will then recommend whether further referrals are advised, and will make any medical referrals.

When a teacher learns that a child's parents plan to initiate a referral for an evaluation of their child, she should report this to her principal so he may discuss this with the parents and request that the findings be made available to the school. The same procedure should be followed when a teacher learns that a student has been evaluated by a physician or agency previously, but a report of the findings has not been sent to the school. The principal will usually have given instructions to the faculty regarding the procedures to be followed in this school. Usually the teacher will have carried out her responsibility when she has reported the information to the principl.

After evaluations are done for a child by a physician, clinic, or other agency, it is helpful for the school to obtain written reports of the findings. A report concerning vision and hearing evaluations is particularly useful, especially if a condition is discovered which necessitates special handling at school.

It will be necessary for the parent to sign a release giving his permission to the physician or agency to release the information to the school. The information is considered confidential, which means that it is to be used only for the best interests of the child and his family, and is to be discussed only by those persons working with the child at school.

Parents are usually willing for reports of evaluations to be made available to the school so that the school may assist in carrying out the recommendations.

However, it is the parents' choice whether or not to request the release of the information. If they decline to request the release of information, this is their decision.

When further information is needed concerning resources available in the State for evaluation or treatment for a child with problems, the director of the county Social Services department or the county health nurse may be consulted. Both are usually knowledgeable concerning services available and can give information concerning the agencies or institutions in question.

Teachers should make use of testing results in their work with the child and in conferences with parents. The teacher should study the findings and recommendations, and then apply them in appropriate ways in working with the child at school. The principal, curriculum director, or counselor should be available to help the teacher with this. They may wish to work together as a team. The counselor usually discusses intelligence test scores with parents.

In talking with parents about test results, the emphasis should be placed on the child's strengths. The teacher should explain the child's weaknesses and how she plans to improve them. She should discuss the child's mental ability in terms of average, superior, below average, and so on.

Test findings may be explained by first discussing the child's strengths and then his weaknesses, always ending with emphasis on strengths. Test findings for Diane, a six-year-old girl, show her mental ability falls in the average range. Her strengths are in the areas of auditory perception and social skills, and she is weak in visual perception. Her gross motor coordination is better than her fine motor skills. Her test findings may be explained in the following manner.

"Diane remembers what she hears better than what she sees. The test shows she has average mental ability. She is quick to pick up new material from games, songs and what the teacher tells the class but doesn't

remember very long what she sees. She plays well with other children, minds the teacher, and tries to please. Her motor coordination is slower than that of some of the other children, so she usually takes longer to finish her work. She remembers instructions very well."

COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS

Pointers for Teacher-Parent Conferences

1. Invite Both Parents to the Conference.

The teacher should let the parents decide if both wish to come, and which one comes if only one attends. The relationships in the family, working schedules of parents, and the distance traveled may be determining factors. Other relatives may want to come along, particularly in the one-parent family. It can be most helpful to have the person attend who is actually at home with the child, whether this is a relative or a baby-sitter. In cases where an agency, such as Family and Children's Services, has custody of the child, consult the agency as to who should attend the teacher-parent conference.

2. Don't be Afraid of Parents.

Sometimes parents and teachers feel nervous because of the authority the other represents. The emphasis should be kept on the fact that both the school and the parents care about the child and want to do what is best for him.

3. Begin the Conference with a Positive Statement About the Child.

The teacher should try to make the parents feel comfortable and at ease. She should express her appreciation for the parents' coming to the conference, and assure them that working together is a privilege. The teacher may then move into the discussion of the purpose of the visit.

4. Listen Closely.

The teacher should listen to the parents' opinion of their child, and their expectations for him. What are their concerns? She should watch for shades of voice tones, gestures, and expressions to help her

to learn more about the parents' feelings toward the child. How does the child spend his time away from school?

5. Begin Where the Parent is.

The teacher should try to look at the situation from their viewpoint. The information gathered by the teacher in preparation for the conference should be helpful here. (See page 6.) How do the parents think the family reached their present situation? Are they happy about it? What do they think should be done? If the present situation is not to their satisfaction, do they blame someone for it?

6. Set the Boundaries for Choices.

When the teacher offers suggestions of ways parents may help at home, she should give alternatives so parents may make their own choices. Encouraging them to make their own decisions is far more effective than having the teacher tell them what to do. This also encourages them to adapt the activity involved to fit into their life-style and ways of doing things.

7. Don't Prejudge the Family.

It is easy to make a snap judgement, and it may prevent the teacher from being objective later. This snap judgement is as likely to be too high as too low.

8. Give Parents Support and Approval.

Parents need a friendly listener who will offer constructive suggestions. Parents need praise and appreciation. The teacher should be prepared to give the parents some suggestions on ways they can help the child. In later conferences, they may talk together about the progress they have made. The teacher should be sure the parents have opportunity to talk.

9. Don't Take Anything for Granted.

The teacher should ask the parents to explain their plans, and learn what they think. It is likely to differ from what the teacher expects.

10. Work Toward an Attitude of Mutual Respect and Cooperation.

The teacher should help the parents to understand that she is interested in them and their child, and that this interest will continue throughout the year. The teacher should show respect for the parents and for their opinions.

11. Make Plans Together for the Future.

It is not necessary to cover everything at one time! The teacher should build a relationship with the parents by discussing with them the sequence of things the teacher and child will do at school during the year. A tentative time should be given for the next conference, with the parents understanding they may contact the teacher if they wish.

12. Close the Conference on a Positive Note.

The teacher should not let the conversation linger on and on once the main subjects have been discussed. As the teacher terminates the conference, she should thank the parents for coming and tell them she would like to talk with them again later in the year.

The teacher may stand, to let the parents know the conference is over. If the parents linger, the teacher may say something like, "I see the Browns are waiting for their conference. Thank you for coming."

How to Work with Parents of a Handicapped Child

The handicapped child is one with a physical, mental, or enotional condition, or a combination of these conditions, that prevents a person fror developing or adjusting in a normal way. The handicapped child, for example, may be one who is shy; has a speech or hearing problem; has a chronic health problem, such as diabetes, epilepsy, or allergy; is slow to learn; has a perceptual problem; or has a behavior problem.

The teacher should treat the parents of a handicapped child, in general, as she would any parent. There are some specific things, however, to be kept in mind in working with these parents.

The parents of a handicapped child usually feel that they are alone in the world. They may not be acquainted with anyone else who has a handicap like the one their child has, and they are likely to feel that no one understands them or their child. They have a hard time being objective about their child's difficulties, because they are living with the problem twenty-four hours a day. They know more about the difficulties of everyday living in their situation than anyone else can ever know.

In talking about this child, the teacher will find that using the word, "different", is helpful. The word, "handicapped", can have a bad connotation to parents, as can the word, "retarded", or "crippled". Whether the child's handicap is mild or severe, remember always that to the parent <u>it is as bad as he thinks it is</u>.

These parents go through three stages in their adjustment to having a child with a handicap:

1. Unbelief

   They feel shock and bewilderment, and may refuse to believe that their child is handicapped. They may take their child from clinic to clinic, hoping to find someone who can cure him, or tell them that his condition is not real.

2. Resentment

They grow to realize that the handicap is real, and feel resentment, grief, and anger. They may feel guilty, blaming themselves or others because this has happened to their child and to them. They may take out these feelings on themselves, the child, or others.

3. Acceptance

They grow to accept that the child really has a handicap, and may try to cope with it. They lean more about its meaning to the child and to them, both now and for the future.

The parents of a handicapped child have the same concerns as other parents, but in a greatly magnified form. Trifles may appear important, but it is harder for these parents to adapt to a situation. They are afraid to look at reality, because it appears so frightening, both now and in the future.

After some parents reach a better understanding of the meaning of the handicap, of its effect on their child, and of its personal meaning, they want to work with others to help other children who have a disability similar to their child's.

One of the most important goals for the parents of the handicapped child is to progress from thinking about their child only as if he were a disabled child, to thinking about him as he is different from all other children with the same disability. They will then begin to see him as being basically like all other children, and as having the same needs.

Ways the Teacher can Help

The teacher can help the parents of a handicapped child in a number of ways:

1. The teacher can describe the way the child acts at school, and help the parent compare with the way the child acts at home.

   This makes it possible to work together on practical solutions for the problems of routine care that are made difficult by the child's disability. Some ingenious ideas have developed from teachers and parents working together on practical help for the child in his daily activities.

2. The teacher can help the parents get and use information to help them with their child.

   Consultative help is usually available to the parents from professional people who are familiar with the child's care. The teacher should encourage the parents to seek information and advice from the child's place of treatment. Sometimes parents are hesitant to ask for information.

   The school nurse, or the counselor, are good resources for printed materials concerning the disease or disability that the child has. If the school nurse or counselor does not have the address of the national organizations concerned, she will be glad to get them for the parents. Often these materials are routinely kept on hand at school, and may be available from these people for the asking.

   Both the counselor and school nurse are available to most school districts to work with the teacher and the parents of the handicapped child.

3. The teacher must remember that, though parents may learn to accept the child's disability, adjustment is a continuing process.

The teacher should reassure the parents often and encourage them from time to time. The parents need the teacher's viewpoint to compare with theirs. They need help in learning to be more objective - not to expect too much, or too little, of their child.

The teacher should continue to encourage the parents to share the findings concerning examinations and check-ups done for the child. In this way the school and home can keep current in adjusting activities to the child's present needs.

How to Work with People with Problems

The teacher should keep in mind that everyone has problems. During the school year any family might be involved with one or more of the following experiences: sickness on the part of children or parents; a move from one home to another; financial problems; marital difficulties, perhaps leading to separation or divorce; death of family members, relatives, or close friends; the birth of a baby; legal difficulties; or a misfortune such as a home fire or an automobile accident. All of these events require adjustment by the individual family members and the family as a whole. This means that many of the parents the teacher sees are coping with much more than how their children are adjusting at school, and the teacher must always keep this in mind.

There are four kinds of problems with which the teacher should not attempt to deal: child abuse, legal custody of the child, and matters which do not pertain to school or are too extensive for the school to handle. The teacher should never attempt to handle them, and should refer them as soon as possible to the principal or counselor.

1. Abuse of the Child.

   When a child comes to school with bruise marks or other evidence showing that he has been physically mistreated, the teacher should report this to the principal immediately.

2. Legal Custody of the Child.

   The teacher should not attempt to advise either parent regarding custody, and cannot take sides in the case.

3. Matters which do not Pertain to School.

   If parents ask the teacher's opinion about some decision which has nothing to do with school, such as a disagreement among relatives

the teacher can take no part in this.

4. Matters which are too Extensive for School.

The teacher should not attempt to counsel with a parent who has a personal or emotional problem.

Teachers most often ask how to work with parents who behave in certain ways, such as the parent who is shy, the parent who is angry, or the parent who does not seem interested. We shall discuss some of these.

The Parent Who is Shy

The teacher should use all the ways she knows to put this person at ease. She should ask some questions that cannot be answered, "yes", or "no". She may let the parent know she appreciates his coming for the conference. If more than one relative is present, the teacher should address the shy one directly, drawing him out with her interest. She should show her approval for something that can be praised.

The Parent Who does not Participate

This parent comes to the conference, but may not talk to the teacher. He is usually one of a group of two or three relatives who have come to the conference. He is courteous, and appears interested, but allows the others to talk for him.

The teacher should be sure each member of the group is introduced. She can encourage each one to talk by asking direct questions. Often the others will answer his questions or talk for him. The teacher should let this person know that she appreciates his coming.

The Parent Who is Angry

The teacher should encourage this person to explain the reason for his anger. She should not argue with him, and should answer his questions honestly and tactfully. She should not be afraid to tell him if she does not know

the answer. They may then attempt together to decide what should be done about the situation. If the teacher is not familiar with the situation, she may wish to take the parent to the principal's office to obtain more information. She should make a definite date for discussing the matter again.

The Parent Who does not Understand

This person may be hard of hearing. He may be a bilingual person, who speaks another language more fluently than English. He may be uneducated, or think it is disrespectful to ask questions of his child's teacher. He may be unfamiliar with the teacher's accent, or the words used.

This parent wants very much to understand, but he does not want to appear disrespectful or look foolish. The teacher should make a special effort to put him at ease. She should talk to this person as though he were answering her.

She should use simple language, and ask questions. If she gets little or no response, she should continue the discussion, making it easy for him to respond. When he begins to talk to the teacher, he is understanding better. The teacher should keep trying until they are communicating with each other.

The Parent Whose Religious Beliefs are in Conflict with School Activities

The teacher must be thoroughly familiar with the policies of her school district to be helpful to this parent. This parent is concerned that his child practice the beliefs of his religion while he attends public school. Each year that the child is in school the parent will probably want to discuss these beliefs with the teacher or principal. It is helpful to those concerned to discuss what is involved.

For example, perhaps the child's religion forbids him to salute the American flag, or to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. The teacher may explain to the parent how

this will be handled at school. The other class members will participate in this activity, while this child sits or busies himself with a quiet activity. The teacher should encourage the parent to explain the beliefs of his religion which might change the child's activities at school. The teacher may then explain how the matter will be handled at school.

Religious beliefs most often affect the way the child dresses, the food he eats, the activities in which he participate, and the holidays he may observe.

Sometimes this parent wants the school to change policies to benefit those of his religious faith. The teacher should suggest that this be discussed with the school principal or superintindent of the school district.

The Parent Who does not seem Interested

This parent may feel that he is not wanted at school. He may think there is nothing to talk about, or that a conference or meeting will be dull. Since both parents are invited to the conference, perhaps the other parent can become interested, and encourage this one. Sometimes other interested parents can help.

This parent might respond to an invitation to visit his child's classroom, to attend a performance in which his child participates, or to an invitation to help the teacher in the classroom. He might become interested in helping obtain or prepare materials for a special classroom activity. If the teacher can get him to school once, it will be up to her to make him feel that he might like to come again. She should then give him another opportunity.

The Parent Who is Critical

The teacher should be well informed on the subject to be discussed. She should stick to the subject. The teacher should answer questions honestly and tactfully. She should not be afraid to tell the parents if she does not know the answer to a question, and she may offer to

obtain it for hom. She may wish to suggest that he talk with the principal to obtain more information.

The Parent Who Cries

The parent is usually feeling frustrated. The teacher should tell him it is all right to cry and offer tissues if he does not have a handkerchief. The teacher should continue talking while the person regains his composure. The teacher may assure the parent that she is interested in him and his problems, and that she knows this is hard for him.

The Parent Who is Worried

This parent is easy to recognize. He is usually worried about much more than his child. He appears ill at ease and nervous, and usually will tell the teacher about his worries when he learns that she is interested.

If his child is doing well, the teacher should tell him so immediately. If his child needs help in certain areas, she should tell him what he may do to help. This parent will feel better when he can work on the problem. The teacher should tell him there are few problems where nothing can be done. This parent will probably need a date for another appointment to discuss progress.

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(Inexpensive prices for single copies; quantity order discounts for both pamphlets. Address communications and make checks payable to the National School Public Relations Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036. Postage free if prepaid.)

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